Building the Capacity of School Leaders and Teachers to Implement Reform at All Levels

Leaders of successful high schools, middle grades schools and technology centers are strengthening their skills and involving the entire school in plans to raise student achievement. The best school leaders establish an environment of continuous progress in which teachers and leaders work together to upgrade curriculum and instruction, examine data to identify weaknesses in school and classroom practices, and develop and implement plans to increase the vitality of school reform.

Leaders and teachers need to agree on a clear mission to help all students succeed. They must be willing to participate wholeheartedly in focus groups, small learning communities and professional development activities to acquire and use more effective ways to prepare students for college and careers. Successful school leaders promote teacher collegiality and higher student performance through use of the Key Practices and technical assistance. They use classroom visits, coaching and mentoring, and other professional development to prepare teachers to focus on greater student achievement.

This newsletter contains four sections of best practices from *MMGW*, *HSTW* and *TCTW* sites that illustrate the importance of: 1) building-level leadership, 2) distributive leadership structures, 3) leadership for continuous improvement and 4) leadership for effective professional development.

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1. Building-Level Leadership by the Principal or the Technology Center Director Matters in Raising Student Achievement

School leaders can have a substantial impact on student achievement when they support teachers and focus on standards-based lessons and rigorous instruction. Effective leaders pay particular attention to language arts, reading and mathematics and ensure that failure is not an option. The best leaders create structures enabling teachers to meet in small groups to ensure that students are being taught to standards and are receiving the re-teaching and extra help needed to meet those standards.

Successful career/technical leaders promote teams of teachers who meet across occupational areas to improve instruction, embed academics into career studies and connect with the community. In doing so, they raise students' academic and technical achievement and engage all students in learning.

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Leadership at the building level is essential for schools to implement the proven practices of the *HSTW*, *MMGW* and *TCTW* improvement initiatives. Data and technical assistance recommendations from these initiatives will not result in changes unless school leaders share the findings and involve the entire faculty in supporting next steps to achieve higher student performance.

Principals Lead the Way to Successful Standards-Based Planning and Lesson Delivery

Research is showing that an effective principal is a key component of successful school reform. He or she can shape the school environment to make it conducive to learning, align instruction with a standards-based curriculum and organize resources to improve teaching and learning. An effective principal makes good decisions about personnel, professional development and other issues that affect the quality of instruction and student achievement.

SREB provides information and assistance to help high school and middle grades principals review lesson plans and observe classroom instruction, organize the school for success with distributed leadership and lead professional learning community meetings.

"Supervision must be part of your normal routine. Supervision cannot be something you get to only when the opportunity presents itself."

Steve Broome
SREB

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"The purpose of this support is to help principals build their capacity to lead teachers in developing standards-based units," said **Steve Broome**, SREB's director of state support for school improvement initiatives. SREB assists principals to build their capacity in three areas:

- **Monitor what matters.** "Supervision must be part of your normal routine," Broome tells principals. "Supervision cannot be something you get to only when the opportunity presents itself. Without a consistent monitoring plan, supervision can get pushed to the back burner or forgotten entirely."

  Broome recommends the Monday Morning Method to monitor instruction in a consistent, efficient way. At the beginning of the week, principals visit classrooms to observe instruction, student engagement, and artifacts or evidence of teaching and learning. "The standards, essential questions and do-now activities should be displayed in the classroom," Broome said. Students should collaborate with other students and self-assess their work. They should receive additional instruction when they fail to meet standards. Teachers need to identify the purpose of the lesson in terms of essential questions to be addressed. They should help students make connections and provide a context for new information.

- **Organize the school for success through distributed leadership.** Involve the staff in focus teams, departmental teams and faculty meetings. Establish a cycle of communication. For example, the departments and the focus teams meet with an agenda and written minutes for the leadership team to review; the leadership team meets to provide feedback to department and focus teams and to establish an agenda for whole-school staff meetings.

- **Provide leadership to teacher collaborative meetings or professional learning communities.** Principals can use a seven-area status check to lead teachers in self-assessing the effectiveness of instructional programs. These main questions guide the status check:

1. **Do we develop standards-based units?**
   - Have we unpacked the standards as a group?
   - Have we developed common assessments?
   - Have we chunked standards/elements into a learning unit?
   - Have we considered the current level of student achievement in planning instructional strategies and materials?
2. **Do we adjust instruction as needed?**
   - Do we reflect on the lesson's learning outcomes and adjust accordingly?
   - Do we plan for differentiation of instruction?
3. **Do we plan to assess for learning?**
   - Do we collect evidence of the current level of understanding of our students?
   - Do we plan appropriate performance tasks?
   - Do we plan for a variety of assessments to triangulate our evidence?

4. **Do we use practices that promote assessment for learning?**
   - Do we use peer/self evaluation?
   - Do we provide rubrics for all major performance tasks?
   - Do we use checklists?
   - Do we examine student work together?
   - Do we post student work with commentary?
   - Do we meet with students to set goals, provide feedback and celebrate success?
   - Do we collect student exemplars at different levels of performance?

5. **Do we use best practices?**
   - Have we established rituals and routines?
   - Do we post daily and unit essential questions?
   - Do we incorporate acceleration strategies?
   - Do we connect assignments to students' interests?
   - Do we make use of graphic organizers?
   - Do we use activating strategies?
   - Do we include summarizing activities in daily lessons?

6. **Do we teach reading for learning in each content area?**
   - Do we ask students to make connections and decide what is important in a text?
   - Do we provide opportunities for students to visualize, infer, predict, summarize and synthesize information?
   - Do we teach students how to question?
   - Do we embed vocabulary in our instruction?
   - Are we aware of our students' reading levels?

7. **Is the classroom environment standards-based?**
   - Do we post standards, student work with teacher commentary, unit and daily essential questions, and content maps?
   - Do students use the language of the standards?
   - Is there evidence of collaborative learning?
   - Do classrooms display meaningful word walls?
   - Have we created a risk-free environment?

"Many people worry that we can't achieve needed reform by focusing on things we have been doing," Broome said, "but we are seeing convincing evidence that principal leaders are the key to high school and middle grades success."

Urban School Uses the *MMGW* Key Practices to Raise Expectations and Achievement

Arthur Eddy Academy, a small urban school in Saginaw, Michigan, is raising student achievement by implementing the *MMGW* Key Practices. The academy serves a high-minority population (98 percent black) of 387 students in pre-kindergarten through grade eight from throughout Saginaw County and beyond.

The academy is based on a MicroSociety® concept that "brings learning to life" by using a mini-community of markets, business ventures, government agencies and cultural organizations created and operated by students. Classroom learning is linked to real-world situations. The academy has earned its reputation as *The School That Means Business!*

Principal **Trent Mosley** provides strong instructional leadership by discussing student data with staff and students, visiting classrooms, making time for instructional conversations, and developing procedures for common school and classroom situations. He is addressing priorities identified by the *MMGW* leadership team, including low expectations, meaningless assignments and past failures.

Staff members have developed several protocols to generate data and raise expectations for classroom activities:

- A classroom walk-through rubric provides criteria for evaluating student engagement, instructional strategies and delivery, hands-on projects, writing for learning and using technology to increase performance.
- Teachers use a monthly check-up form to reflect on their instructional priorities and obstacles. They rate classroom and administrative procedures, collegiality and parent interaction. They also identify goals for the coming month.
- The staff uses a building discipline plan rubric to address student behavior.
- Teachers use a monthly project-based learning calendar to register projects by providing descriptions and rubrics and connecting the projects to English/language arts, mathematics, science and/or social studies.
- A new literacy plan includes a summer reading list and public library locations and hours of operation. Vocabulary words are identified as basic, proficient and advanced and are aligned to the required tasks embedded in Michigan's grade-level exams.
- Students use a reflection card by subject in each grading period to identify things they did well, areas they did not understand, behavior, and goals and objectives for the upcoming period. They use another form to tell how they are progressing in a subject, the areas of their best work, three things they learned and their favorite learning activities.
- Teachers receive feedback via a survey that allows students to tell whether the school is a safe place for learning and whether they can speak openly with their teachers.

The staff also developed a homework grading policy for students in grades six through eight. The policy clarifies teacher, student and parent expectations and contains a homework accountability record, information on the school's Zeros Aren't Possible program, and extra-help opportunities.

Teachers have implemented an advisory program for students in grades six through eight. The program includes student-led conferences and opportunities for parents to communicate with teachers. A goal-setting document allows students to identify strategies to achieve their education and career goals. It also allows parents to pledge support for their children in achieving those goals.

Parent involvement is a major priority for Arthur Eddy Academy. The school conducts evening programs for parents and students to discuss reading and writing strategies that parents can promote at home. Staff members have created a brochure on *MMGW* that includes the expectations for school leaders and teachers, students and parents in achieving successful learning. The brochure also lists *MMGW* questions for parents to become more informed about the Key Practices.

The Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) showed that Arthur Eddy students made gains in English/language arts and mathematics in grades six and seven between 2007-2008 and 2008-2009.

Mosley credits teacher leadership and buy-in, as well as administrative action, with making needed changes at the school. Resource teacher **Tina Munoz** was instrumental in helping the principal keep the staff focused and motivated to implement the *MMGW* Key Practices.

"Arthur Eddy represents the type of progress that can be achieved when the staff and administration of a school are aligned in their expectations and have a clear vision of excellence for their students," Mosley said. "We are committed to completing the school improvement journey together."

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Failure Is Not an Option: School Leaders Focus on Rigor, Relevance and Extra Help

Leaders at **Meade High School** in Fort Meade, Maryland, ensure that all programs and activities support the school's mission:

> *"Meade High School will be recognized throughout Maryland for providing rigorous, relevant and engaging learning to a diverse community of learners within a nurturing, respectful and culturally sensitive environment in order to cultivate effective citizens, workers and lifelong learners who will positively impact society for generations to come."*

The concept that "failure is not an option" is the driving force behind the mission. One outgrowth is the "Mustang Way," the school's strategy for improving student achievement through rigor and relevance. Students have access to the International Baccalaureate (IB) program, various academies, the Project Lead The Way® engineering curriculum and Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) — a rigorous program designed to help underachieving students prepare for and succeed in colleges and universities.

Meade was one of the first schools in the nation to offer a Homeland Security program, a four-year course designed to prepare students to seek employment and/or to complete postsecondary education in homeland security — a modern, rapidly growing career field. An Integrated Community Stakeholders' Team (ICST) was organized to help the school plan curriculum, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, clubs and future directions for students in the program.

The school's 'no repeaters' policy makes it possible for students failing to earn credit for a semester or a course to attend afternoon and evening sessions.

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No Repeaters

The school's "no repeaters" policy makes it possible for students failing to earn credit for a semester or a course to attend afternoon and evening sessions for fees ranging from $75 to $200. Students cannot repeat the course during the regular school day. "Passing the first time is priceless," teacher **Rosemary Asquino** said.

All students have access to extra help on PLUS days — the last two days of the month. Instead of introducing new material during that time, teachers provide enrichment for some students while allowing others to re-do or make up work. "PLUS days hold teachers responsible for maximizing student learning opportunities," Principal **Daryl Kennedy** said.

The school's efforts to raise student achievement have resulted in an increased pass rate on the mathematics section of the Maryland High School Assessments (HSA) of 43 percentage points in three years, from 2005 to 2008. "While achievement in other areas has been less dramatic, scores have increased in all sections of the HSA," Assistant Principal Yolanda Clark said.

Academic ineligibility declined nine percentage points between 2005 and 2009. In addition, the grade point average (GPA) of students rose from 2.22 in 2005 to 2.61 in 2009. The number of discipline referrals declined seven percent between 2003 and 2008.

The '10 Keys' of *HSTW* Can Unlock Doors to Higher Achievement

For almost a decade, **Corbin High School** (CHS) in Corbin, Kentucky, has used the *HSTW* Key Practices to unlock doors to higher student achievement. The school's mission is to prepare every student to make the transition from high school to postsecondary studies, the workplace and life.

Expectations at CHS are high, and students rise to the challenge. Students complete 26 credits for graduation — four more than the Kentucky requirement. All students are expected to graduate with a pre-college curriculum. Advanced Placement (AP) courses are available to everyone in seven subject areas. "We try to enroll a large number of students in AP classes," Principal **Joyce Phillips** said. "We would rather work with diamonds in the rough than exclude students because they don't quite meet AP entrance requirements."

As a result of higher standards, the average ACT score at CHS is 21.8 and more than 99 percent of CHS students graduate in four years. CHS has been selected as an *HSTW* Pacesetter School and as one of the top 100 high-implementation *HSTW* schools in the nation.

"We would rather work with diamonds in the rough than exclude students because they don't quite meet AP entrance requirements."

Joyce Phillips
Corbin High School

New Schedule

School leaders are not afraid to make dramatic changes in the school structure and curriculum to meet the increasing needs of students for higher-level studies. One major step was to abandon the 4 x 4 block schedule that had been followed for 14 years and to convert to a five-period trimester schedule. "Our staff worked together for 18 months to plan for the scheduling change," Phillips said. The format includes five 70- to 75-minute periods per day and three 12-week semesters per year.

The trimester system allowed the school to offer 11 new academic electives, including Creative Writing, Great American Debates and Kentucky Studies. "We have an enrollment of 745 students, but our electives rival those of a larger school," Phillips said.

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Eight career/technical courses are available on campus. Students may also complete programs such as automotive, health care and the Project Lead The Way® engineering curriculum at the shared-time Corbin Area Technology Center. Work-based learning opportunities are abundant due to strong partnerships between CHS and local businesses.

Freshman Center

The Freshman Center, now in its 13th year, allows ninth-graders to take core courses in the morning exclusively with other ninth-graders. Upperclassmen needing freshman-level courses learn from certified teachers in the computer lab rather than attend classes with new ninth-graders.

CHS leaders and teachers are dedicated to the philosophy that 20 percent of students will learn no matter what, but the other 80 percent need a "hook" — something that causes them to want to attend school and learn. The result is a full array of student-focused instruction, guidance and advisement, extra help, school-based enterprises and dual-credit courses designed to interest and involve students in preparing for graduation, college and careers.

- Teachers use **bell-ringer activities** in the form of short engaging problems that students are asked to solve at the beginning of every class. Teachers use the full class period for instruction and serve as facilitators to encourage students to be independent learners in mathematics and science.

- The **advisory program** involves teachers in helping students and their parents explore and select career pathways and plan sequences of courses leading to chosen career majors. Students' academic progress is monitored in the advisory program. Students and their advisers meet weekly in groups of 14 to 17 students. They keep the same advisers in grades 10 through 12.
- Students have access to **extra help** through extended school services available before school and until the media center closes at 5 p.m.
- **School-based enterprises** include a catering service, a student bank, a radio and TV station, a digital arts program that does print work for the community and a live theater operation.
- Students can receive **dual credit** for certain courses taken in conjunction with Eastern Kentucky University, Somerset Community College and Sullivan University. Giving students a "leg up" on college is one way to retain their interest and involvement in learning.

CHS leaders foster a culture of continuous improvement through teacher collaboration, data examination and analysis, and professional development. Social studies chair **John Crawford** believes common planning and common assessment are keys to continuous improvement. "Common assessments were a pain in the beginning, but we soon realized that the process is necessary to move Corbin High School to the next level of improvement," Crawford said.

Assistant Principal **Nicole Brock** said, "Our aim is to prepare students to attend college at any point in their lives, whether it is immediately after graduation or 15 years later."

Principals Develop 'Intensive Care' for Students Needing Extra Help to Succeed

Borrowing a page from the medical profession, two school leaders use the concept of the ICU (Intensive Care Unit) to intervene when students need extra help with schoolwork.

Danny Hill and **Jayson Nave** believe the ICU system works in education because it reminds students daily (sometimes several times a day) about pending or missing assignments. Hill is the principal of **Southside Elementary School**, serving students in kindergarten through grade eight in Lebanon, Tennessee, and Nave is the principal of **Sevierville Middle School** in Sevierville, Tennessee.

The ICU system is how Hill and Nave have led their schools in implementing a "no zeroes" policy of high expectations for all students. "A 'no zeroes' grading policy requires constant monitoring of student assignments," Hill said. "With the ICU process, students find it easier to complete an assignment by the deadline than to deal with constant reminders and checks from the school support system."

Through the ICU system, when students fail to complete assignments, their names are placed on a list and they are assigned to teachers who work with the students and their parents to deliver extra help before, during or after school until the assignments are completed.

Turning apathetic students into responsible, goal-oriented individuals did not happen overnight, but the results have been outstanding. Every student at Southside Elementary School completed all assigned work for the past three years, Hill said. "Ninety-three percent of students completed all of their work on time," he added.

To tell the story, Hill and Nave collaborated to write a book about their experiences and successes. *Power of ICU* contains first-person reports as well as specific details, sample forms and helpful advice. One anecdote describes a student who refused to do his assignments on time. After experiencing ICU, the student called the school one morning asking for a ride so that he would not miss class that day.

More information on the ICU approach is available from Hill and Nave on their Web site, www.poweroficu.com.

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Beyond the TAV: Leading Change for School Improvement

Several years ago, leaders at **Florence High School** (FHS) in suburban Florence, Mississippi, realized that they needed to act quickly and productively to prevent students from failing. The FHS student population of 600 is 80 percent white and 20 percent black. Many students were scoring low on state tests, and ACT and SAT results were below the national average.

The school participated in the 2006 *HSTW* Assessment to obtain data on student achievement in reading, mathematics and science and then hosted an SREB Technical Assistance Visit (TAV) to learn what the school needed to do to improve teaching and learning.

"The TAV revealed several areas of weakness," said former Assistant Principal **Suzanne Conquest**, now principal at McLaurin Elementary School in Florence. In fact, the list of actions for improvement contained 23 suggestions for changes in curriculum and instruction. Teachers were stunned. Staff morale plummeted. Nineteen teachers left the staff. "After our new principal replaced nearly half of the teaching personnel, the journey to improvement began," Conquest said.

Outstanding Improvement

Just three years after the 2006 TAV, Florence High School received an *HSTW* Gold Award for making outstanding improvement in implementation of the *HSTW* design from 2006 to 2008. The award also signifies that FHS had at least 50 percent of students meeting one or more readiness goals on the 2008 *HSTW* Assessment.

The FHS leadership team spearheaded the improvement process by studying the SREB leadership module *Using Data to Focus Improvement*. "This enabled us to develop a plan of action that included professional development, book studies, professional learning communities and more student-centered activities," Conquest said. Leaders also studied SREB's module *Creating a High-Performance Learning Culture*, which revealed the need to raise expectations for every student.

"Today, there are no easy classes at Florence High School. The change in school culture has brought increased rigor in every course."

Suzanne Conquest

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Faculty groups began meeting during planning periods to discuss changes, obstacles and victories related to the belief that all students can succeed. As the process continued, teachers and administrators felt the need for better communication to reach their goals. The answer was to participate in training associated with SREB's leadership module *Communicating to Engage Stakeholders in Improvement*. As a result, teachers are collaborating routinely to make learning better for their students. (See http://www.sreb.org/page/1268/improving_the_school_as_a_system.html for information on SREB's leadership modules.)

"Today, there are no easy classes at Florence High School," Conquest said. "The change in school culture has brought increased rigor in every course, common course assessments and college-level classes offered here at the high school. The goal is for every student to complete the *HSTW*-recommended curriculum of high-level academic courses and a major."

Improving instruction — All teachers received professional development to increase the rigor and effectiveness of their teaching. Teams of teachers immersed themselves in studying proven educational strategies. Professional learning communities were organized to provide a format for teachers to examine student work, conduct book studies and share knowledge. Administrators participated in departmental meetings where teachers of similar courses had time to collaborate on course alignment, standards in practice, common assessments and ways to eliminate student failure.

Supporting students — When school leaders realized that students were spending too much time at their lockers, they removed the lockers and placed additional sets of textbooks in classrooms. They also adjusted the schedule to allow time for Eagle's Nest — a daily 30-minute period during which students connect with adult mentors in an advisory program. Teacher-advisers have lesson plans for the advisory sessions, but they are able to adjust the content to meet the needs of students. Students are required to participate as needed in tutoring offered by certified teachers before, during and after school. The library opens before school and students are encouraged to read for pleasure.

Florence High School's actions have yielded positive results. The 2008 *HSTW* Assessment showed a sizeable increase in reading achievement. More students are enrolled in advanced and upper-level courses. The FHS graduation rate in 2009 was 95 percent, up from 91 percent the previous year. Students' SAT and ACT scores also have risen, and of the 80 percent of students who enter postsecondary education, 90 percent receive scholarships.

2. Organizing the School for Distributive Leadership

Successful school leaders recognize that they cannot give individual leadership to every staff member; therefore, they design new organizational structures to make it possible for teams of teachers to share leadership and take ownership of problems and solutions. Focus teams and small learning communities are two opportunities for teachers to meet to discuss better ways to improve teaching and learning.

In the following examples, school leaders describe successful methods of bringing teachers together to implement the *HSTW*, *MMGW* and *TCTW* frameworks to prepare all students at a much higher level. These frameworks for higher achievement are designed to guide and direct teams of teachers as they take more responsibility for improving school and classroom practices.

Assistant Principals Take Leadership Roles in Small Learning Communities

DeWitt Clinton High School is a large urban school enrolling 4,300 students in Bronx, New York. It has 330 faculty members. The *HSTW* model became its school improvement design four years ago.

The school is organized into a ninth-grade academy for freshmen and seven small learning communities (SLCs) for students in grades 10 through 12. The eight assistant principals (APs) at DeWitt Clinton have been asked to go beyond traditional roles and to assume additional duties and responsibilities as leaders of the academy and the SLCs.

Each AP oversees the organization and daily management of one SLC. The APs work with teachers from all disciplines in their SLCs and often form teams with other APs to observe and participate with teachers in many different content areas. In New York City, many high school APs are licensed in a content area and usually supervise in a content area. With the formation of the SLCs, they now oversee instruction in a variety of content areas.

"Shared leadership is necessary so that all teachers can play an active role in supporting student learning."

Geraldine Ambrosio
DeWitt Clinton High School

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Principal **Geraldine Ambrosio** provides overall supervision of the eight SLCs. As the lead instructional expert, she ensures that each SLC is focused and is working to raise student achievement. "It is important for each SLC to provide a rigorous core curriculum," Ambrosio said, "so that every student will succeed in college and careers."

Now in the third year of wall-to-wall SLCs, the APs are engaged in developing the leadership capacity of teachers. "Shared leadership is necessary so that all teachers can play an active role in supporting student learning," Ambrosio said. SLC coordinators and teacher leaders lead professional development sessions and/or conduct case study meetings where student achievement information is shared and discussed. These steps are important for continuity of the instructional program and for developing additional leaders in the SLCs.

"Assistant principals need to exhibit flexibility, teamwork and data-driven decision making to assume expanded roles in school leadership," Ambrosio said. "They also need time and access to professional development to strengthen their leadership skills." The APs have participated in sessions on data-driven assessment, quality reviews and using tuning protocols for feedback. They have also attended *HSTW* workshops.

Schools considering how to expand the responsibilities of assistant principals in SLCs will find two activities especially helpful for teams of school leaders and teachers:

1) Discuss the role of an AP five years ago and what it should be now.

2) List five essential tasks that the AP of an SLC should be able to do in your school.

Assistant principals need to have frank discussions among themselves about what they see in a lesson and how they can join together to help teachers improve student performance.

"The work of assistant principals at DeWitt Clinton High School has made the difference in the success of SLCs," Ambrosio said. "The ability of assistant principals to work together as a team across content areas has improved student learning by increasing academic rigor and differentiation in the classroom."

Rural School Develops Instructional Leaders to Increase Student Success

Effective instructional leaders are vital to schools seeking to raise student achievement. By the same token, teamwork is essential to develop effective instructional leaders. **Keyser High School** (KHS) in rural Keyser, West Virginia, provides examples of how to use professional learning communities to strengthen instructional leadership.

KHS serves 780 students in grades nine through 12, with a student population that is 93 percent white, 6 percent black and 1 percent Hispanic. Forty-five percent of students are from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

School leaders set out in summer 2008 to address a gap between "knowing" and "doing" in the classroom. The result is a network of teachers who reflect on their practices, design their professional development experiences and continuously improve the school.

Teachers learned 21st-century instructional methods such as effective questioning and project-based learning. They developed portfolios of successful strategies and posted lesson plans online for administrators to read and provide feedback.

"To be effective, school leadership must include all administrative and instructional staff members working as a team," according to teacher and *HSTW* site co-coordinator **Debbie Seldomridge**. She and co-coordinator **Jerry Eisenhour** help administrators and teachers accomplish the vision of *HSTW*.

Focus teams of teachers are the basis for developing instructional leaders at KHS. Five teams actively address specific responsibilities:

- The **curriculum and instruction** team ensures that all students complete a challenging sequence of academic courses. The county has adopted the rigorous *HSTW*-recommended academic core and for many years has required career majors. Representatives of local schools, higher education and industry meet regularly to review the program of study.
- The **professional development** team, in cooperation with administrators and the site co-coordinators, plans training opportunities for the coming year. The plan is based on faculty needs and requests as well as current trends in education. Team members lead some of the sessions, including one during the past year titled "Putting Depth into the Content Standards and Objectives."
- The **positive support and academic assistance** team increases faculty awareness of available resources and works to obtain new resources.
- The **transition**, **guidance and data analysis** team coordinates ways to provide successful transitions for eighth-graders into high school and 12th-graders into college and careers. The team conducted a freshman orientation that acquainted students with high school and involved parents in ensuring student success. "Parents commented that the program increased their comfort level in helping students prepare for graduation and beyond," Seldomridge said. The team also facilitates communication between students and parents concerning course scheduling and college and career planning.
- The **senior affairs** team oversees senior exhibitions of mastery, which were initiated at KHS during 2008-2009.

"Working in isolation is not the most effective way to raise student achievement. We know that collaborative learning works for students, but it has taken awhile to realize that it works for teachers and administrators too."

Debbie Seldomridge
Keyser High School

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"Working in isolation is not the most effective way to raise student achievement," Seldomridge said. "We know that collaborative learning works for students, but it has taken awhile to realize that it works for teachers and administrators too."

Team chairs receive orientation to their roles and responsibilities as well as input and support for their meeting agendas. "They submit logs that allow us to assess where the teams are going," Seldomridge said. "When the teams brainstormed how to prepare students for state testing, we decided to focus on mathematics in one daily advisory period and on reading and language arts in another advisory period. Twelve seniors were trained by mathematics teachers to provide peer tutoring to freshmen on Tuesdays, sophomores on Wednesdays and juniors on Thursdays."

The 2009 WESTEST 2 data showed that Keyser High School students exceeded state averages in all four areas — reading and language arts, mathematics, science and social studies. "Our most recent Technical Assistance Visit showed a significant increase in student-directed instruction and a decrease in teacher-directed instruction," Seldomridge said.

Principal **Charles Wimer** says focus group participation enables teachers to contribute positively to the learning culture at the school. "Teachers make many of the decisions and suggest many of the programs," he said. "It's no longer a matter of the principal saying, 'We're going to have electronic lesson plans next year.' The teachers made that decision."

School Succeeds With Teamwork and the *HSTW* Key Practices

District and school leaders have used teamwork, a high level of staff commitment to student achievement and the *HSTW* Key Practices to ensure that **Dalton High School** (DHS) in Dalton, Georgia, has successfully adapted to a changing community and a growing minority population.

The DHS student population of more than 1,400 students is 57.9 percent Hispanic, 28.2 percent white, 6.6 percent black and 7.3 percent other ethnicities. The high percentage of Hispanic students has resulted from large-scale worker migration to the "carpet capital of the world."

"The changing face of Dalton High School over the past 15 years has been a challenge that we have met through teamwork," said **Larry Murkerson**, one of four assistant principals and the school's career/technical director. "We have also benefitted from central office support for everything we do."

In 2009, DHS posted a first-time passing rate on the Georgia High School Graduation Test in English/language arts, mathematics, science and social studies that averaged over 94 percent. DHS has been named an *HSTW* Pacesetter School for its rigorous curriculum, high achievement and deep implementation of the *HSTW* school reform initiative.

Murkerson said DHS began implementing the *HSTW* Key Practices in earnest in 2002, paying particular attention to student achievement data and student and teacher survey results. Major changes in school and classroom practices have occurred in the following areas:

- **Raising expectations —** All general education courses were eliminated in 2004. "Everyone takes college-prep courses," Murkerson said.
- **Engaging students in learning —** DHS specializes in project-based learning. Teachers receive coaching to improve instruction. All career/technical students produce portfolios of their best work to show to colleges and employers.
- **Guidance and advisement —** Students are organized alphabetically into advisory groups led by assistant principals with support from school counselors. Emphasis is placed on helping ninth-graders succeed to overcome the freshman retention problem that is an ongoing challenge at the school.
- **Extra help —** DHS offers the NovaNET® computer-based credit recovery system. Students who fail to meet academic standards are enrolled in the program. Subject-area teachers provide after-school tutoring.
- **Continuous improvement —** Teams of teachers have been created to focus on end-of-course testing. Departmental focus groups meet once or twice a week to discuss instructional strategies and other ways to improve the academic achievement of individuals and groups of students. Schoolwide faculty meetings are a time to share information and celebrate success.
- **Strong leadership —** The administrative leadership team is stable and committed to higher achievement. School and system leaders participate with teachers in *HSTW* conferences and other professional development.

New High School

Dalton City Schools opened a new high school — **Morris Innovative High School** — at the beginning of the 2009-2010 school year. Initially, the school is intended to bring students at risk of failing "back into the mainstream," Murkerson explained. The school serves 120 students, including DHS students who failed core subjects in grade nine or are entering the ninth grade unable to pass the state's Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCTs).

"The intent is for these students to re-enter Dalton High School and continue until graduation," Murkerson said. Within a few years, the new school is expected to become a full-fledged high school for students in grades nine through 12.

Career/Technical Emphasis

DHS leaders have worked to update its career/technical (CT) courses. "Every CT program has been renovated in some way in the past six years," Murkerson said. Courses were upgraded by strengthening the curriculum, buying new equipment and materials, and employing better-qualified staff.

Many DHS students pursue both academic and CT studies. "In a graduating class of 273 students in 2009, a total of 154 students earned dual-seal diplomas and 39 students graduated with career/technical seals," Murkerson said. "This means that 70 percent of graduates in 2009 had career/technical seals on their diplomas signifying that they completed a sequence of at least four career/technical courses."

Students have access to modern, rigorous CT programs such as the Project Lead The Way® engineering curriculum, culinary arts, graphic arts, law and justice, marketing, video production, Junior ROTC, childhood development, manufacturing and computers. They learn academic and worksite skills by participating in youth apprenticeships with local companies.

To enhance student achievement, DHS is undergoing a $12.5 million expansion that will add 20 new classrooms, five science labs and five computer labs.

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Two Superintendents Credit *TCTW* with Raising Teacher Performance and Student Achievement

The *Technology Centers That Work* (*TCTW*) initiative is making a difference in how shared-time technology centers conduct their business. Instructors are using more effective teaching methods and students are achieving at a higher level. Those conclusions are from two superintendents — one in New Jersey and the other in Oklahoma — who discussed their experiences in implementing *TCTW*.

Kimberly Schneider, superintendent at **Mercer County Technical School District** in Pennington, New Jersey, said *TCTW* provides faculty with an enlightened view of career/technical education (CTE). "Technical skills are viewed as the ultimate application of academic skills," Schneider said. "Academics and CTE are integrated."

Mercer County Technical Schools offers 37 programs for youth and adults at four permanent locations and one satellite location in the county. As the service provider for all public and non-public school districts in Mercer County, MCTS enrolls students from 22 sending schools ranging from urban to rural.

Evaluating Programs

Schneider values the 2008 *HSTW* Assessment, which provided baseline data on student achievement and student and teacher opinions. "The assessment gives us a way to continually evaluate our programs," she said.

The district's first *TCTW* Technical Assistance Visit revealed the need to revisit the mission statement to ensure that students are being prepared for both careers and further study. "The visit showed the need for change," Schneider said. "It helped us see the necessity to raise expectations, improve the level of student engagement, develop a system of extra help and examine the quality of all programs."

Since joining *TCTW* in 2007, the district has organized into focus teams to implement the improvement design. Activities have included attending national conferences, receiving literacy training, aligning the curriculum with community college and readiness standards, developing course syllabi in a common format, requiring capstone projects, and doing baseline testing of senior completers.

The district will step up its outreach activities, including open houses, mass mailings, family nights, student-counselor meetings and presentations to sending schools, to acquaint everyone with the improvement initiative and its progress in preparing students for the future.

One noteworthy accomplishment is an increase in National Occupational Competency Testing Institute (NOCTI) scores in 2008-2009. Every student in the culinary arts and auto collision programs passed the written and performance tests, compared with between 70 percent and 80 percent of students in these programs in previous years.

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Doug Major was superintendent of Pioneer Technology Center in Ponca City, Oklahoma, when it joined *TCTW* in 2007. He is now superintendent/CEO of Meridian Technology Center in Stillwater, Oklahoma.

While at Pioneer, he became concerned about the image of CTE in the minds of many people. "After learning of the lack of research-based evidence on the benefits of CTE, I resolved to try to improve the reputation and the outcomes of career/technical programs," Major said.

As one of the first members of the *TCTW* initiative, Pioneer has hosted a TAV, administered the student and teacher surveys, participated in focused professional development and created a common vision to guide the improvement effort.

"Like students from many other centers, Pioneer students have been successful in gaining knowledge and skills for career success," Major said. "Recognizing that there is always room for improvement, Pioneer chose *Technology Centers That Work* as a school improvement model. During the first TAV, the visiting team discovered several areas where even greater student success can be achieved."

The following challenges are among those identified through *TCTW* that have formed the basis for actions to improve teaching and learning at Pioneer Technology Center:

- Instruction and assignments in many classrooms needed to be more rigorous. Students in some classrooms needed to be more actively engaged in learning.

"Recognizing that there is always room for improvement, Pioneer chose *Technology Centers That Work* as a school improvement model."

Doug Major

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- Only six students had taken chemistry at a sending school before enrolling in the science-rich curriculum at Pioneer.
- Many students were required to take remedial classes.
- Too few teachers were involved in using data to improve curriculum and instruction.
- Teachers did not agree on what it takes to earn grades of A, B or C.
- More consistency was needed in dealing with attendance issues and expectations.

Pioneer began offering professional development on implementing small learning communities, developing common beliefs and a vision statement, focusing on literacy for learning in the classroom and promoting the effective use of data in decision making. One problem that received a lot of attention was the "red flag" issue of absenteeism.

Is *TCTW* making a difference at Pioneer? Various faculty members think so. Here are some of their comments about the initiative:

"*TCTW* has allowed us to expect more of students. It's okay to assign homework. It's okay to take time in a technical class or shop to focus on relevancy and rigor in academics as they relate to each technical field."

"The 30 or so minutes we took out of class and shop time to work on improving writing skills and writing technical research papers has paid big dividends to our students. The progress the students made in four months was amazing and really proved to me that if you throw down a challenge, students will rise to meet or exceed it."

"*TCTW* is fueling the desire of teachers to get better at what we do."

"*TCTW* has created a greater interest in improving instruction."

"Administrators and teachers are more involved with students and parents."

Using Data and Technical Assistance Feedback to Organize School Focus Teams

The 2006 *HSTW* Teacher Survey was an eye-opener for **Firestone High School** in Akron, Ohio. Only 26 percent of teachers surveyed at this urban school strongly agreed that "the staff continuously uses data reports to evaluate the school's academic programs and activities." Only 10 percent reported that "staff development programs are sustained over time, with ample follow-up activities."

Using teacher survey results, assessment data and a recent *HSTW* TAV report, school leaders created focus teams to address the school improvement goal:

"*Continue to support a culture of continuous improvement with strong leadership, actively involved school improvement teams, effective use of data, aligned professional development, and engagement of parents and families as part of a seamless school improvement process.*"

Every staff member serves on one of the nine focus teams: curriculum and instruction, professional development, guidance and advisement, evaluation and assessment, transitions, environment and public relations, faculty advisory council, discipline review, and athletics. "We wanted to involve the entire staff in taking responsibility for implementing the school improvement plan," *HSTW* Site Coordinator **Christopher Pashke** said.

Organized during the 2009-2010 school year, each focus team developed a goal and a set of "charges" that will result in action plans for reaching the goals. The teams meet twice a year on district waiver days and at least once a month on other days.

Firestone High School was named as both an *HSTW* Pacesetter site and as one of the top 100 high-implementation *HSTW* sites in the nation.

"We wanted to involve the entire staff in taking responsibility for implementing the school improvement plan."

Christopher Pashke
Firestone High School

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Using Super Cluster Teams to Involve the Faculty in Instructional Improvement

Metro Technology Centers (Metro Tech) in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, used "super cluster teams" to involve the faculty in improving student instruction, engagement and satisfaction. The teams also worked to implement Perkins legislation requirements for career clusters and to align cluster activities with the *TCTW* Key Practices.

The district assigned the lead teacher/assistant director to lead a cross-disciplinary "super team" of teachers from related career clusters. Each team involves faculty from all courses in those clusters and includes at least one member of the *TCTW* team. Administrators established clear goals and empowered the teams to create their own action plans and methods of working together. Each team has the same goals and measures of success, which reflect the *TCTW* Key Practices.

Super Cluster Team Goal	*TCTW* Key Practice
Develop an advisory committee.	Industry collaboration; Culture of continuous improvement
Align short-term courses with fulltime career majors.	Program of study
Develop teaching assignments based on shared content and faculty expertise.	Teachers working together
Develop integrated academic plans and projects.	Rigorous academic studies
Develop team-based projects.	Work-based learning for all students; 21st-century skills
Incorporate work-based learning experiences into all career majors in the super cluster.	Work-based learning for all students

Deborah Kamphaus, lead teacher/assistant director of Metro Tech's Health Careers Center, says the following lessons were learned in developing super cluster teams:

- Choose a diverse team with a variety of expertise and abilities.
- Ensure administrative support to help the faculty see possibilities and become excited about the concept. Administrators can help teachers see the connection between super clusters and the *TCTW* initiative.
- Don't simply add requirements; allow flexibility to replace old strategies with new ones.
- Create opportunities to share best practices and lessons learned from one super cluster to another.

As a result of the super teams, all faculty members became familiar with the Critical Thinking Wheel, which provides quick and easy access to critical thinking tools based on Bloom's Taxonomy of learning styles. They also received questions to ask to increase instructional rigor. Questions designed to promote higher-order thinking in the classroom include:

- Evaluation — What data were used to evaluate changes in plans or projects?
- Analysis — What are the pros and cons of decisions made by your group?
- Synthesis — What alternative would you suggest for completing the work and the educational objectives missed while the school was closed for snow days?
- Application — What would be the outcome if we changed the medication and/or dosage given to a patient?

Two faculty meetings per month have been converted to e-meetings to allow teachers to discuss instructional strategies e-mailed to them in advance. This electronic approach saves time for professional development and sharing best practices.

Academic teachers join career/technical instructors in developing and implementing project-based learning activities. "Project-based learning adds excitement and interest to learning a career," Kamphaus said. "It increases knowledge and allows students to preview real-world situations."

One project is a mock hospital involving high school and post-secondary students in health science and public safety career clusters in carrying out the roles of staff and patients. Students did the necessary research to write policies and procedures for the various hospital departments. They also learned the associated skills sets to make the simulated hospital as authentic as possible.

Metro Tech's team approach is one of a number of actions that have led to increased academic integration and rigor, resulting in higher achievement. During 2008 the number of Metro Tech students participating in contextual academic instruction rose 29 percent. The school has seen an average increase among students of 1.28 grade levels in KeyTrain, a system for improving basic skills measured by the WorkKeys assessment; a 14.2 percent gain in occupational competency test achievement; and a 206 percent rise in the number of WorkKeys career-readiness certificates earned by students.

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Site Coordinators Support Schools in Using the Key Practices to Raise Student Achievement

The job of an *HSTW* site coordinator is both an opportunity and a responsibility. A good site coordinator can make the difference in whether the school creates a culture of high expectations and continuous improvement.

"When I became site coordinator at **Estherville Lincoln Central High School** in Estherville, Iowa, I was fortunate to have a principal that gave me responsibility for implementing the school improvement plan," said **Steve Weisman**. Former ELCHS principal **Susan Bish** explains: "We had undergone a round of budget cuts and I had no assistant principal. There was no way I could coordinate everything we needed to do to carry out the school improvement plan. It was good that Steve had been a longtime teacher at the school and was respected by the staff."

Now an SREB school improvement consultant, Weisman works with site coordinators in the *HSTW* network to help them implement the Key Practices.

"I learned that you don't do it alone. The *HSTW* network has many resources to help schools reach their goals."

Steve Weisman
SREB School Improvement Consultant

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Seek Help

"I learned that you don't do it alone," Weisman said. "The *HSTW* network has many resources to help schools reach their goals." For example, site coordinators can visit successful coordinators in other schools, participate in *HSTW* leadership events, attend the annual summer staff development conference, and use the SREB Web site and *HSTW* publications.

One definite asset is the availability of SREB school improvement consultants. "My consultant was great to share information and encourage me to do a good job," Weisman said.

Another plus is being able to attend a workshop designed for site coordinators. "It gives coordinators the confidence to return to their schools and begin or continue to make a difference," Weisman said. He has conducted the workshop for the past three years.

Understand and Motivate

Weisman believes effective site coordinators must understand the *HSTW* design and have the passion to implement the Key Practices to raise student achievement. They must be motivators to help the principal and the school leadership team to make necessary changes. They must be excellent communicators who can share the school's vision and explain how the Key Practices are an integral part of the school culture.

At the same time, good site coordinators arrange for teachers to discuss what is needed to improve school and classroom practices. They also work with focus teams to ensure that challenges are addressed and tasks are completed.

"The school's TAV report is an in-depth document by an SREB consultant and a team of educators," Weisman said. "It presents best practices, next steps and challenges with suggested actions for improving school and classroom practices. The site coordinator must understand recommendations in the report and know why addressing the challenges will make a difference."

The following to-do list will help site coordinators make a bigger impact in their schools:

- Establish focus teams for teachers to examine the TAV report and/or the results of a site development workshop. Help teachers join their preferred teams. Ask the teams to use the TAV report, the *HSTW* Assessment and survey results, and other data to justify decisions.
- Help the focus teams develop meeting agendas and a meeting format that will yield results. Monitor the assignments of focus team members.
- Develop three- to six-year action plans for implementing the Key Practices. Revisit the plans annually.
- Complete the *HSTW* benchmarks document and the annual progress report.
- Use school needs and action plans to prioritize professional development activities.

- Maintain the lines of communication among focus teams, faculty, administrators, district personnel and the community. Present plans to the superintendent and the school board in a timely way.
- Find alternatives to obstacles hindering implementation of action plans.
- Promote the *HSTW* framework. Tell the story; share success; ask the news media to report actions and progress.
- Facilitate the biennial *HSTW* Assessment. Ensure 12th-graders and the faculty understand the reason for the assessment and the information to be gained from it.
- Recognize winners of *HSTW* student awards.
- Help the faculty use data from assessments and surveys. Simplify the findings and look at trends.
- Create an *HSTW* portfolio of yearly activities in implementing the Key Practices.

3. Leadership by Principals and Teachers to Ensure Continuous Improvement

School principals can set the tone in their buildings that they are never going to be satisfied, that they are constantly looking at how to improve teaching and learning, and that they will use data and technical assistance to make a difference. These principals can engage teachers in the process by giving them leadership roles in focus teams and small learning communities.

Schools that become complacent and fail to examine curriculum and instruction to find more effective strategies are destined to fall behind in preparing students for college and careers. A good approach involves asking questions: Where are we? How many teachers are using data? Where do we want to be in the future? What can we do to get there?

This section contains examples from schools that have become high-performing sites by constantly seeking to achieve better results. These schools have raised the bar by adhering to the school improvement plan, using data and technical assistance, and getting everyone to share a schoolwide vision of excellence.

Don't Panic: Give Thoughtful and Productive Responses to Accountability

"Teachers get caught up in the testing and re-testing phenomenon and may not be using allocated teaching time the best ways for students to learn."

Lorin Anderson
University of South Carolina

Fear and panic are natural responses when teachers are confronted with accountability systems and measures that are out of alignment with the curriculum and classroom practices, says **Lorin Anderson**, distinguished professor emeritus at the University of South Carolina in Columbia, South Carolina. "The people writing the tests are not necessarily the people creating the standards," he said. "The result is a misalignment between what we teach and what we test."

In more than 10 years of educational research, Anderson has found panic responses that are common among administrators and teachers facing the high demands of accountability:

- Complaining about standards, tests and/or students
- Increasing the number of tests given during the year
- Programming teachers through the use of scripts, observational rubrics and pacing guides
- Spending an increasing amount of time on test preparation and review

"Most states have lost about 25 percent of their instructional time by the frequent use of benchmarking and testing," he said. "Teachers get caught up in the testing and re-testing phenomenon and may not be using allocated teaching time the best ways for students to learn."

Anderson recommends thoughtful and productive responses to accountability that can be taken by school leaders and teachers seeking to improve their schools:

- Increase the alignment of objectives, assessments and instruction.
- Teach in a way that empowers students rather than increases their dependence on teachers.
- Be more concerned with differentiating instruction based on "what" is being taught instead of "who" is being taught.

The following chart is designed to help teachers focus on differences in objectives rather than differences among students:

Focus of Objectives:	Emphasis of Instruction:
Remember	Tell
Understand	Ask
Apply	Show
Analyze and Evaluate	Model
Create	Guide

"Teachers can increase student empowerment by guiding them, providing a structure and a safety net, encouraging risk taking in finding the right answer, and providing feedback and suggestions for improvement."

Lorin Anderson
University of South Carolina

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"By using this approach, teachers can talk with students and then find out how they arrived at the answers. They can ask what students gained from learning new information rather than simply giving the correct answer," Anderson said. For example, in teaching students the objective "apply," teachers can provide a visual representation of the procedure students are being asked to apply, how to apply the procedure step by step, some situations in which the procedure applies and does not apply, and how to monitor progress, including making adjustments as needed.

Anderson believes the most important step in this new approach to differentiation is for teachers to empower students to learn. "Teachers can increase student empowerment by guiding them, providing a structure and a safety net, encouraging risk taking in finding the right answer, and providing feedback and suggestions for improvement," he said. "They also can assign responsibilities with consequences, teach learning strategies along with content, and provide alternative learning resources other than the teacher."

The benefits of student empowerment are students who are more motivated and increasingly mature, teachers who spend less time on classroom management and more time on teaching students who need help, and a larger number of responsible citizens, Anderson concluded.

No Idea Left Behind: Vo-Tech School Improves by Implementing the *HSTW* Key Practices

Continuous improvement has been a hallmark of **Tri-County Regional Vocational-Technical High School** in Franklin, Massachusetts, since school leaders and teachers immersed themselves in the *HSTW* Key Practices. In 1995, in response to school reform measures from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Tri-County sent representatives to seek new information and best practices at the Annual *HSTW* Staff Development Conference.

"Before we attended the conference, we had limited rigor in the curriculum, limited approaches to teaching reading and mathematics for learning, and very little project-based learning," noted science teacher **Joe Pedro**. There were no Advanced Placement (AP) courses. "Classroom management varied dramatically from teacher to teacher," Pedro added.

Tri-County enrolls 964 students from 11 member towns in the district. Since joining *HSTW*, the school has been named an *HSTW* Pacesetter School twice and was identified as one of the top 100 *HSTW* sites for implementation of the Key Practices and improved student achievement.

School leaders established a site committee and five focus teams and developed an action plan to address *HSTW* student assessment and survey results. The site committee recommended the improvement plan to the principal and subsequently to the state department of education.

Tri-County leaders and teachers gained a better understanding of school leadership and instruction by attending additional *HSTW* conferences and encouraging a number of school-based efforts to address student achievement problems:

- Increasing course requirements to four years each of English/language arts, mathematics, science and social studies
- Eliminating courses below the college-prep level so that all special education students are served through inclusion
- Offering new programs such as financial literacy and AP calculus and literature; requiring all freshmen to take a semester of technology; and establishing senior science electives in anatomy/physiology and microbiology
- Using the TechPaths curriculum-mapping method in academic and CT programs
- Offering a summer academy for entering freshmen whose testing indicates a limited readiness for high school English/language arts and mathematics
- Establishing a homework center to serve struggling students during after-school hour

- Reviewing and amending the attendance policy
- Offering a summer school for credit recovery
- Increasing professional development opportunities, especially in differentiated instruction
- Recommending structural changes to strengthen the *HSTW* site committee
- Inviting guest speakers from the community to share their insights on education and careers

Other improvements have included initiating a schoolwide writing program and linking the faculty via a computer network.

Students complete a mandatory senior project and participate in a required community service program. The senior project includes a research paper on a career-related topic that requires study beyond the CT curriculum and the development of a related product or demonstration that is presented to a panel of judges, including industry representatives and school administrators and teachers. Students in the community service program complete PowerPoint presentations and write papers to reflect on their citizen-involvement projects. Social studies teacher **Paul Trovato** noted that the community service experience serves as a mid-term exam for social studies credit.

Tri-County students also maintain required portfolios of their best academic and CT efforts. The entries include career certifications, awards and other evidence of achievement. Students use the portfolios in work-based learning and college and employment interviews.

The results of these changes have been outstanding. Every student in the graduating classes of 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010 passed the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests in English/language arts and mathematics. Each one passed the MCAS biology test (a state graduation requirement beginning with the class of 2009) in 2009 and 2010. In addition, proficiency levels beyond the passing score increased to a record 82 percent in English/language arts and 77 percent in mathematics in 2009.

Sixty percent of graduates enter college, and 38 seniors in 2009 and 52 seniors in 2010 qualified for Adams Scholarships in the state's largest merit-based scholarship program. Tri-County graduates are being accepted by and attending a number of public and private postsecondary institutions.

"We are continuing to add rigor to the curriculum and to provide support for our students," Pedro said. "Our school is an excellent example of how shared leadership and responsibility can generate a climate of high expectations and performance."

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Middle Grades Teachers Use Data to Set High Expectations for Student Achievement

Every time we look at data, we find more ways to use it in the classroom," said **Darla Dunlap**, assistant principal at **Van Wert Middle School** in Van Wert, Ohio. The school was chosen by the National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform as one of 10 middle grades Schools to Watch in the state of Ohio. It also earned recognition as one of the top 50 high-implementation *Making Middle Grades Work* (*MMGW*) sites in the nation.

Van Wert enrolls 480 students in grades six through eight. Forty-six percent qualify for free or reduced-price lunches and 19 percent are classified as special education students.

The school uses data in tables, graphs, charts and lists as a "scorecard" to show teachers whether they are making a difference in student achievement. Since the curriculum and the data are ongoing, the constant examination of data provides timely feedback so that teachers can make adjustments as they teach instead of waiting until the end of the school year.

"It isn't good enough for teachers simply to think students are learning in the classroom. We must have the data to show where we need to improve and whether we are doing a good job and have cause to celebrate."

Darla Dunlap
Van Wert Middle School

Sharing Data

Van Wert Middle School uses a variety of ways to share the *MMGW* data from the student assessment, student survey and teacher survey. A manageable portion of the data is used at meetings, including full staff meetings, team meetings and

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departmental meetings. "We may share only one or two pages of data at a meeting, depending on how complex the findings are," Dunlap said. Teachers receive the information prior to the meeting.

Discussions at staff meetings may take place as a data walk or a silent data walk. A data walk involves small groups of teachers visiting "data stations" set up around the room. Each station or space on the wall contains data on a particular topic or from a specific test. Teams of teachers spend time discussing the data and recording their group input on the wall. After each team has visited each station, the entire group discusses the implications of the data on instruction. A silent data walk is similar; the only difference is that teachers write individual rather than group comments to discuss in the whole-group portion of the meeting. "Both of these methods are viable ways to involve teachers in reflecting on the data before they begin their discussions," Dunlap said.

As teachers work in teams, they explore the data and develop strategies and action steps aligned with district achievement goals. The district leadership team decides whether the actions support the district goals.

Putting Data to Work

When it became clear from looking at the data that Van Wert eighth-graders were missing a lot of science and social studies test questions that were based on standards from lower grade levels, teachers brainstormed ways to help students tap into previous learning. The solution was to invite teachers from grades six and seven to review key concepts and the labs reinforcing those concepts with eighth-graders in the classroom. "Test scores improved and students felt more prepared for the next level," Dunlap said.

Numbers tell the story at Van Wert Middle School. Fourteen percent of students attended mandatory summer school in 2001. As the school used data to help raise student achievement, the percentage dropped to 2 percent in 2008.

"Data will continue to be important in helping our students succeed," Dunlap said. "It isn't good enough for teachers simply to think students are learning in the classroom. We must have the data to show where we need to improve and whether we are doing a good job and have cause to celebrate."

School Works to Exceed *HSTW* High-Scoring Sites

During 1999-2000 the state of Ohio designated **Brookside High School** (BHS) in Sheffield, Ohio, as a "continuous improvement" school and required school leaders to develop an improvement plan to raise student achievement. BHS is a comprehensive high school enrolling 607 students. More than 90 percent of BHS students are white and 35 percent qualify for free or reduced-price lunches.

Leaders, teachers and community members at BHS took action by selecting *HSTW* as the improvement framework and by focusing on three main activities: assessment, teachers working together and curriculum changes.

Assessment — Prior to the holiday break in December, leaders and teachers conduct small group meetings with seniors to review the *HSTW* Assessment process and its importance both to students and to the school. BHS seniors participated in the assessment in 2000 and every two years since that time.

In 2000, only 24 percent of students met the readiness goal in reading, 56 percent met the goal in mathematics and 54 percent met the goal in science. In 2004, 2006 and 2008, BHS students scored higher on the *HSTW* Assessment than the mean scores at all *HSTW* sites. Now the school is working to exceed the average performance of students at high-scoring *HSTW* sites.

The 2008 data showed that 81 percent of BHS students met the reading readiness goal, compared with 56 percent of students at all sites and 75 percent at high-scoring sites. Also in 2008, 75 percent of BHS students met the science readiness goal, compared with 71 percent of students at high-scoring sites.

Teachers Working Together — Administrators have empowered the faculty to establish a team culture at the school. Every teacher serves on a focus team that addresses three to four objectives each year. Release time is built into the schedule for teachers to meet with their teams monthly. Teachers are encouraged to attend the *HSTW* Staff Development Conference in the summer and to participate in state *HSTW* professional development activities as well as other professional development.

Curriculum changes — BHS quickly eliminated all low-level courses and required all students to earn four credits in each core area — English, mathematics, science and social studies. The school instituted a new daily schedule by eliminating study halls that were being used as "social time" and maximizing learning time in the classroom. Students are required to attend a "bonus period" for extra help when they fall behind in their assignments. Freshman students receive extra help with note-taking and time management.

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Using Business Savvy to Focus a Tech Center Faculty on Results

David Ruhman, former director of **Arcadia Valley Career Technology Center** in Ironton, Missouri, developed a series of professional development programs based on school data and business management principles to motivate teachers to improve student achievement. Arcadia Valley CTC is a rural institution serving students from eight comprehensive high schools.

In four monthly half-day sessions, Ruhman focused on staff involvement in school reform by using *HSTW* Assessment results from students and teachers to encourage personal commitment, cooperative effort and data usage as the "three essential layers of intervention and improvement."

Personal Commitment — Teachers must believe they can make a difference in whether students succeed in school and in life. Ruhman used author Patrick Lencioni's model from the book *The Three Signs of a Miserable Job* to inspire teachers. Lencioni says employees are unhappy if they go unrecognized for what they are doing, if they fail to see the connection between what they are doing and the well-being of others, and if they are unable to measure their progress and levels of contribution. "Two benefits of using Lencioni's model are increased productivity and retention of good employees," Ruhman said.

Cooperative Effort — Arcadia Valley professional development sessions also incorporated ideas from Peter Drucker's book *The Five Most Important Questions You Will Ever Ask About Your Organization*. The questions are: What is our mission? Who is our customer? What does the customer value? What are our results? What is our plan? "We related what Peter Drucker said about commitment to the future, the customer, the mission and the process to our teachers' commitment to meeting the needs of students and fulfilling the school's improvement goals," Ruhman said. "Teachers need the same type of commitment to education that hospital workers need to determine the condition of patients entering the emergency room."

Ruhman organized the staff into two groups — one focusing on curriculum and the other on school improvement — to develop intervention strategies for the following year. Each group had a mentor to exchange information with the other group to keep everyone informed of decisions and activities.

Learning from the Data — The Arcadia Valley faculty reviewed the school's 2008 *HSTW* Assessment results, including students' performance in reading, mathematics and science as well as responses to the student and teacher surveys. "We asked teachers to examine the results and to be candid about where more effort was needed," Ruhman said. The school administered the assessment as a first step in joining *TCTW*.

"The faculty agreed with me that we could improve the baseline findings from the teacher survey," Ruhman said. "We wanted larger percentages of teachers reporting that they were consulted about decisions, that preparation without remediation is an important goal and that it is very important to help students acquire the technical knowledge and skills to get a good job."

"My experience with professional development and planning at Arcadia Valley showed the validity of using focus groups to broaden faculty involvement and the Key Practices to guide implementation of new strategies."

David Ruhman

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After reviewing the data, the faculty was ready to look to the future. The professional development included a discussion of the *TCTW* Key Practices and how they relate to upgrading curriculum, instruction and student achievement. As a result, the faculty decided to take the following actions:

- Work with students in grades nine and 10 to meet college-readiness goals in reading, mathematics and science.
- Arrange for failing students to get needed academic help.
- Encourage dual enrollment in high school and the technology center.

In 2009 Ruhman became career education director at Herndon Career Center in Raytown, Missouri. Herndon is a suburban facility serving 400 students from six school districts.

"My experience with professional development and planning at Arcadia Valley showed the validity of using focus groups to broaden faculty involvement and the Key Practices to guide implementation of new strategies at Herndon Career Center," Ruhman said. Like Arcadia Valley, Herndon is joining the *TCTW* initiative and beginning to use the Key Practices to focus staff and student effort.

Tech Centers Use Data and Technical Assistance to Improve Teaching and Learning

Leaders of three successful *Technology Centers That Work* (*TCTW*) sites attribute their progress to receiving data and technical assistance through the *TCTW* initiative.

Tri-County Technology Center in Bartlesville, Oklahoma, involved all faculty and staff in a multi-step process of examining information, relating it to the *TCTW* Key Practices, and developing goals to be implemented in the 2010-2011 school year.

Three staff members reviewed the *HSTW* Assessment data, technical assistance recommendations and data from sending schools before placing the information under the various Key Practices. "Duplication was common," said **Barbara Herren**, assistant superintendent of instruction. "For example, the need to improve math and science scores may have been listed under as many as five Key Practices." Staff members were assigned to serve as Key Practice "champions" to study the data and to develop charts, graphs and summaries of findings as they related to each Key Practice.

During a day-long workshop, the faculty and staff were introduced to the data through a café-style activity. A "champion" for each Key Practice displayed his or her information at a table that all teachers and staff members visited during the day to give their input on actions the school should take to raise student achievement. At a subsequent staff meeting, each staff member voted on the actions they thought were most important for the school to pursue, selecting four major actions:

- Strengthen guidance and advisement by using career plans and programs of study and by having teachers, counselors and key staff members advise/mentor students on a regular basis.
- Build relationships among students, parents, instructors and staff.
- Create small learning communities by career cluster to increase instructor collaboration, strengthen educational experiences and promote instructional best practices.
- Assess the prevalence of poverty issues affecting students in the district and provide professional development to all staff through speakers, simulations and lunchtime meetings to study the book *Bridges Out of Poverty*.

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Data from the *HSTW* Assessment showed that 62 percent of students at **Calhoun County Career Technical Center** in Jacksonville, Alabama, were reading below the Basic level. As a result, the center implemented a plan known as "Read It, State It, Write It and Do It" to improve students' reading skills. In the first 15 minutes of each class period, students **read** a variety of materials related to the career cluster being taught. The materials include textbooks, trade magazines, newspaper articles, safety manuals and written directions — the types of materials that students will need to read and understand as they enter and advance in a career field. Without referring to the materials, students **state** what they have learned, **write** about the information and then **apply** the knowledge in the career lab. Students also write three to five vocabulary words and use them in everyday conversations.

The center made other changes in response to assessment data and TAV recommendations. "Students rotate through each career cluster to gain an understanding of common knowledge and skills," said Principal **David Talley**. "First- and second-year students complete anchor projects that are not as in-depth as the required senior project but may substitute for semester tests in the future."

After adopting a new mission to "prepare students for ever-changing career fields and advanced study beyond high school," the staff identified actions to implement each *TCTW* Key Practice. For example, they related having students redo work to the Key Practice of raising expectations; they associated meetings between center instructors and core academic teachers at the sending schools to the Key Practice calling for teachers to work together.

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The faculty at **Perryville Area Career and Technology Center** in Perryville, Missouri, identified goals related to four areas: guidance activities, programs of study, higher expectations and extra help. Counselor **James Harryman** points to new guidance practices, including "adventure tours" to encourage students in grade four to begin thinking about career and educational opportunities; an information night for parents of eighth-graders; and a career carousel for sophomores. The guidance staff provides career and educational planning assistance to students in grades nine through 12.

Staff members have identified language arts competencies embedded in the CT programs and are offering tutoring in reading, writing and mathematics.

The center hosts an annual dinner for board of education members and administrators of sending schools; holds open house events three times during the year; and utilizes newspapers, TV and the school Web site to acquaint readers and viewers with progress being made at the center.

"More people are aware of the center's goals, staff support has grown tremendously, and student achievement is improving," Harryman said.

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4. Supporting Teachers by Providing Opportunities to Learn and Implement New Techniques

Schools offer a tremendous amount of professional development, but too little is implemented and much of it is not aligned with the school improvement plan. Teachers need to know that school leaders support them in upgrading their skills and in putting new approaches into practice in the classroom. They also need to play a role in planning what they need to know to help students in their classrooms make greater strides in learning.

Staff development does not always have to take place in a traditional workshop setting. Some of the best examples of learning new instructional techniques have resulted from coaching and mentoring teachers and observing in classrooms. This section contains approaches that have been successful for teachers in a variety of schools. When a new technique works in getting students to respect knowledge, participate actively in their studies and achieve at a higher level, teachers are motivated to keep moving forward in efforts to prepare students for the future.

Teacher Collegiality Supports Higher Student Achievement

"While working with a group of school administrators, I asked them to consider what three changes in teachers could produce the greatest improvement in student achievement. I asked them to write down their answers before engaging in small group discussions. As I walked around the room looking over shoulders, I saw that many administrators had written similar statements as their top two answers. The statements were about relationships with students, knowing students better, having students know that they are known and communicating a caring attitude toward students.

"When I shared my observations, the group of school leaders quickly informed me that my discovery was very common knowledge. Then I asked them to list the number of professional development sessions they had conducted on the topic of relationships with students. I asked how often relationships had been the focus of a faculty, department or grade-level meeting. The topic of relationships was missing from these occasions. Strangely, the leaders considered relationships to be extremely important, but they didn't include them in conversations with teachers."

"When teachers learn from each other, students witness independent learning and observe interpersonal and relationship skills."

Steve Barkley
Performance Learning Systems

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Steve Barkley, executive vice president of **Performance Learning Systems** in Allentown, Pennsylvania, related this experience with school leaders to introduce a presentation on how to improve teachers' knowledge and collegiality to support higher student achievement.

He used a definition of student achievement from Fairfax County Public Schools in Fairfax, Virginia. "Student achievement goals consist of academics, life skills and responsibility to the community," he said. "'Academics' refers to the knowledge and skills to be successful in school and life; 'life skills' include aptitude, attitude and skills to lead responsible, fulfilling and respectful lives; 'responsibility to the community' includes attributes that contribute to an effective and productive community and the common good of all."

Three questions are related to achievement in all three areas, Barkley said: What are the changes in student behavior, performance, choices and effort that lead to improved student learning? What changes must occur in teacher practices to generate higher student achievement? Do changes need to occur in the way teachers work with each other in order for teacher practices to improve?

Barkley cited educator **Roland Barth**, founder of the **Principals' Center at Harvard University**, who believes understanding teacher relationships is the first step in developing collegiality in schools. In "Improving Relationships Within the Schoolhouse" (*Educational Leadership*, March 2006), Barth identified four teacher relationships:

- Parallel play — Teachers work in their classrooms and communicate very little with other teachers.
- Adversarial relationships — Teachers withhold information from each other and undermine teaching efforts.
- Congenial relationships — Teachers socialize but do not talk about how to improve teaching. Friendship and work are separate.
- Collegial relationships — Teachers discuss best practices, share their strategies and root for each other's success.

Barth gives four examples of collegiality:

- Teachers talk with each other about the work they do — in faculty meetings, hallways, classrooms and during mealtimes.
- Teachers share their knowledge of teaching and honor it when someone else shares.
- Teachers make their practices mutually visible. "You come into my classroom and watch me teach biology and I will visit your class and watch you teach geometry. Then we will talk about what we are doing and why and what we can learn from each other."
- Collegiality means rooting for the success of others. "If every adult in the school is rooting for you, you jump out of bed and go to school."

"Small learning communities and student advisory groups allow teachers to focus collectively on individual student success," Barkley said. "When teachers learn from each other, students witness independent learning and observe interpersonal and relationship skills."

Keeping the Momentum Going With Professional Development and Teacher Collaboration

In the bestseller *GOOD TO GREAT*: *Why Some Companies Make the Leap...And Others Don't*, author Jim Collins describes the "flywheel effect." With steady pushing, employees of a company can increase the speed of a flywheel until it spins on its own, moving the company forward from good to great.

Leaders at **Sylvania Southview High School** (SSHS) in Sylvania, Ohio, use the "flywheel effect" to propel school reform. Throughout the year, teachers participate in small learning communities to determine what is needed to improve classroom instruction. At the end of the year, they share ways their individualized learning has enhanced instruction and student achievement. When teachers see their efforts paying off in higher student achievement, it keeps the momentum going.

The SSHS student population of 1,350 students is 86 percent white, 5 percent Asian, 4 percent black, 3 percent multi-racial and 2 percent Hispanic. Seventy-nine percent of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunches.

Four years ago, the school began focusing on the *HSTW* Key Practices to raise expectations and provide extra help, use data and encourage teachers to work together. The first step was a summer seminar during which almost half of the 90-person faculty volunteered to spend two days looking at school data, such as the number of F's by grade level, students with more than one F and first-semester disciplinary actions.

"The data findings led to a concerted effort to provide extra help," Assistant Principal **Dave Minard** said. The extra-help strategies have included mentors, guided studies pullouts during the school day, Ohio Graduation Tests (OGT) interventions, failure interventions and subject-specific tutoring.

The following examples show how Sylvania Southview High School has used professional development and teacher collaboration to raise student achievement:

Professional development — All teachers participate in professional development during regular two-hour "late starts," which have received high teacher approval ratings.

Teacher collaboration — Teachers work together in many ways, including horizontal articulation of curriculum and instruction and participation in focus teams. The leadership team oversees guidelines for other teams, including curriculum, intervention, data and technology, and staff development.

Increases in student achievement keep the wheel turning at SSHS. The graduation rate was 97.2 in 2008, exceeding the state goal of 90 percent.

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After the science department head became concerned about student performance on the state-mandated OGT, a team of Science 9 and biology teachers met to rewrite the OGT practice test. The new test was more rigorous and was designed to do a better job of evaluating student preparedness. "The test was successful on all counts," Minard said. The same group of teachers will evaluate test results each year and make changes to the practice test as needed.

Increases in student achievement keep the wheel turning at SSHS. The graduation rate was 97.2 in 2008, exceeding the state goal of 90 percent. The mean ACT scores were 23 and above for the past three years. Tenth-graders at SSHS equaled or outperformed their peers in the district and the state in reading, mathematics, science and social studies on the Ohio Graduation Tests in 2007-2008. SREB recognized SSHS as one of the top 100 most-improved *HSTW* sites in the nation.

Staff Development on a Dime: Hard Work, but Effective

Teachers need quality professional development to improve their skills and to work together in raising student achievement. "Unfortunately, many schools spend too little time planning staff development," says **Kathey Long**, assistant principal at **Hoover High School** (HHS) in Hoover, Alabama.

Staff development at HHS starts with extensive preparation by a school committee. From its beginning in 2005 with staff members who volunteered to serve, the committee has grown to a maximum membership of 13. Teachers with ideas and suggestions for professional development are invited to serve. The school secretary is an ongoing member to coordinate and support professional development activities.

"We begin our annual planning by choosing a theme," Long said. The themes are based on school needs or topics related to the school's Continuous Improvement Plan (CIP). One recent thrust was to improve ACT scores. Teachers presented "best practices" for incorporating ACT application and awareness into classroom lessons. Hoover teachers and ACT preparation instructors "flooded" professional development days with information that teachers could use immediately in the classroom.

Other Themes

Professional development themes are reflected in the program, the session titles and the invitations to teachers to participate. Other themes have included "Growing Together," "A Recipe for Student Achievement" and "Hoover CSI: Collaboration Scene Investigation." The collaboration theme was used in the spring when teachers were preparing to launch professional learning communities in the upcoming school year. All sessions focused on team building and working together.

Long develops agendas for the planning meetings with topics such as sessions, schedules and speakers. Every committee member takes responsibility for part of the work.

The committee makes the staff development cost-effective by using many of the school's staff members to present break-out sessions on instructional approaches that have worked for them in the classroom. Committee members nominate teachers as presenters and send formal invitations asking them to speak.

Community Support

Community organizations are asked to "sponsor" professional development by donating funds to pay for lunches, door prizes and t-shirts. The committee lists the sponsors on the program and sends thank-you letters for their support.

Teachers identify the breakout sessions they want to attend to improve their instructional skills. As a result, all teachers have personal schedules of sessions to meet their needs.

"Planning is the key," Long says. "Committee members spend many hours working on the details of each professional development program. However, they know that contributing to a positive learning environment is worth the investment."

Long says professional development has made a big difference in teacher effort and morale. "More teachers are involved in all areas of school planning," she said. "Teachers from the senior campus attend meetings and collaborate with teachers from the freshman campus on matters such as curriculum. Our efforts in interdisciplinary and vertical teaming have been enhanced."

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Behavior Management Plan Allows Teachers to Teach and Students to Learn

"Teachers in a behavior management program learn to be proactive and assertive in dealing with classroom issues and can once again focus on teaching."

Bert Simmons
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Discipline is the number-one problem in many schools. It impacts teaching and learning and occupies many hours of valuable administrator and faculty time.

Bert Simmons of Simmons Associates in Sunriver, Oregon, advocates a comprehensive behavior management program that puts teachers in charge of the classroom, ensures the support of administrators, and lets students and parents know what to expect if students break the rules.

"The three main challenges in school discipline are that teachers have not been trained to implement a discipline program; that they are dealing with many kinds of discipline problems, including tardiness, fighting, disrespect, truancy and defiance; and that many schools lack a systematic program that really works," Simmons said.

Traditional disciplinary methods are no longer effective, according to Simmons. These old-fashioned philosophies include "Don't smile until Christmas," "Tell them how mean you are," and "Master teachers can handle anything." Such approaches fail to address teachers' fundamental needs to control their classrooms and to know that principals support their actions, Simmons said.

The Simmons 10-step "On Time" plan is an example of putting discipline practices in place and making everyone aware of the consequences:

1. Establish an expectation for students to be seated before the bell or at the designated signal.
2. Post the expectation in every classroom.
3. Prepare a tardy tracking sheet to be located 10 to 15 feet from the classroom door. Students sign in when they are late.
4. Remind late arrivals not to talk with the teacher.
5. Students sign the tardy tracking sheet, seat themselves, join in the lesson and talk with the teacher the last two minutes of class.
6. The teacher takes the last two minutes of the class period to deal with management concerns, including tardy students.
7. The teacher has a planned script to use in the last two minutes.
8. Parents are contacted on the second teacher-student conference. A discipline card is issued on the third instance.
9. The teacher has a positive plan for the class when tardies diminish and become nonexistent.
10. All staff members start class on time and have a consistent, effective plan for dealing with discipline issues.

"My research has shown that a behavior management program can lower day-to-day classroom problems by 85 percent," Simmons said. "The other 15 percent can be addressed by working with parents and through more stringent administrative policies."

Schools have reported success after introducing a comprehensive behavior management program. A school in Ohio reported an immediate reduction in office referrals from 9.4 per period to 1.5 per period by the end of the first semester of implementation. A Texas school reduced the number of referrals for using inappropriate language from 299 to 21 students in one year.

"A decrease in behavior problems means a decrease in the amount of stress placed on teachers who are expected to be the sole arbiters of discipline in the classroom," Simmons said. "Teachers in a behavior management program learn to be proactive and assertive in dealing with classroom issues and can once again focus on teaching."

Coaching Technical Teachers to be Engaging Instructors

Often, career/technical instructors come to education from industry. They know their subject matter, but they may lack skills for integrating academics into career/technical studies and for using engaging instructional strategies to involve students more actively in learning.

Two technical schools in Pennsylvania have had success in using instructional coaches to upgrade the content delivery of their CT instructors. The teachers themselves and students' scores on industry-specific exams are testimony that the approach is working.

Andrew Tommelleo, director of **Lawrence County Career and Technology Center** in New Castle, Pennsylvania, found a retired mathematics teacher to work part-time to boost the expertise of academic and CT instructors at the center. The technical center is located in an urban setting with a diverse student population drawn from eight different schools.

The Lawrence County "coach" mentors new and experienced teachers to promote higher levels of student engagement in learning. He assists teachers with classroom management and discipline issues and helps students with problem-solving skills to improve employment opportunities. "The coach has drawn on his experiences in the classroom to build working relationships with current teachers," Tommelleo said. Teacher feedback has been positive.

- An electronics teacher at Lawrence County called the instructional coach invaluable. "He is honest and direct, easy to communicate with and works easily with students of all ages," the instructor said.
- An auto tech teacher said the coach takes information from the text and the teacher to make mathematics principles specific to what is being taught. "He has gained the trust of students and has demonstrated a thought process to help them figure out problems on their own," the teacher said. Since the coach began working in the classroom, the teacher has seen "better readings on the micrometers, rulers and addition and subtraction of readings to get the values needed for comparison to the specifications in the book."
- A mathematics teacher said, "Having the coach in the classroom during my second year of teaching gave me the extra confidence and support I needed early in my teaching career. It was nice to have someone who presented ideas and suggestions that I could add and adjust to fit my teaching style and comfort level."

Alice Davis, director of **Susquehanna County Career and Technology Center**, located in a small rural district in Dimock, Pennsylvania, contracted with professional coach **Dan Perna** of James Daniel & Associates in Shamokin Dam, Pennsylvania, to help her teachers become more effective. The school received a grant and then used Tech Prep and Perkins monies to fund the coaching experience.

"Our teachers participate in individual coaching sessions with Dan Perna," Davis said. "They give up their weekly prep time to learn more about how to incorporate literacy and numeracy into their instruction." Teachers tell their colleagues about classroom experiences with the new knowledge, are observed in the classroom and take part in exit interviews with Davis to talk about what happened during the past year and what is coming up in the future.

Davis has seen significant changes in classroom instruction due to coaching. "Our teachers started using new strategies to challenge students at a higher level and to involve students in meaningful projects such as using a computer to get information about building a home in a construction class. Since we raised the bar in teaching and learning, students expect to do more challenging projects and assignments."

The effectiveness of coaching at Susquehanna is evident in students' higher scores on the National Occupational Competency Testing Institute (NOCTI) exams. The percentages of students scoring at the advanced level rose from 43.4 percent in 2006 to 68.5 percent in 2009.

"Having the coach in the classroom during my second year of teaching gave me the extra confidence and support I needed early in my teaching career."

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Walk-Abouts: Teachers and Students Benefit From Peer Observations

Principal **Merrier Jackson** of **Mae Eanes Middle School** was determined that this inner-city school in the Mobile County Public School System in Alabama would make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) — and it has reached that goal. One strategy she and her leadership team used successfully was to send peer observers into classrooms to suggest ways to improve instruction and student learning.

Mae Eanes has 56 faculty and staff members, including 36 certified teachers. The enrollment is 473 students in grades six through eight. Ninety-seven percent of students are black and almost 100 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches.

Jackson collaborated with Assistant Superintendent **Karen Mohr** and *MMGW* coach **Betty Harbin** to develop a walk-about system that would enhance teacher training and promote a more cohesive school culture. Teachers brainstormed ideas that became a set of non-evaluative criteria for the peer observations.

- Observers would enter quietly and spread out around the classroom rather than stand in a group.
- They would be specific about what they observed without adding personal comments.
- They would not interrupt the lesson.
- They would give immediate feedback by writing a comment about a positive aspect of the instruction on a note to stick on the classroom door as they exited.

Taking Notes

Peer observers received instructions from the principal and a form to record classroom findings, including what the teacher was doing and whether the students were actively engaged in learning. Each observer received a list of classrooms to be visited and a stack of sticky notes.

It is interesting to see how the observations have evolved. "The first observations were not very deep, but they were certainly a good beginning," Jackson said. "As we continued to schedule classroom visits, administrators encouraged teachers to focus deeper by determining such things as the correlation between the course standard written on the board and the portion of the lesson being taught."

"Walk-abouts helped break down walls between administrators and teachers and between teachers and their colleagues. The school culture is more positive and the students have gained a spark that was missing."

Merrier Jackson
Mae Eanes Middle School

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The classroom setup was another focal point of observation. Could all students see the instructional materials on boards and screens? Could the teacher work easily with all students? Could students gather the materials they needed? What things in the classroom distracted students' attention from learning? "In several classrooms, rows of students faced each other," Jackson said. "This was a problem because it made it easier for students to talk to each other, pass items back and forth, and generally get off-task."

More Depth

During discussions after each classroom visit, the groups of peer observers began to replace surface observations with in-depth information about the effectiveness of the instruction and the proficiency levels of the student work. Observers began to want to know how teachers maintained discipline, framed high-level questions for teacher-student discussions, structured small groups to promote learning by all members and to keep students on task, and made sure students mastered the content before moving to the next topic. They also wanted to know how teachers checked for understanding during lessons.

Observers used a Plus-Delta-Prescription form to note what they liked about the classroom activities, what they would change or improve, and next steps for stopping, sustaining or improving the instructional process. "We compiled information from the reviews and gave teachers explicit feedback during normal data meeting time," Jackson said. "Plans to address deficiencies were addressed in data meetings and faculty meetings."

The comments of peer observers were telling. For example, one mathematics teacher said, "Walk-Abouts made me more aware of how the little things I say or do can contribute to the quality of work being done by my students." Teachers participating in the walk-abouts became more enthusiastic with each visit and began talking about how to adapt successful strategies for use in their own classrooms.

Peer observation motivated Mae Eanes teachers to self-reflect on their use of time in the classroom, their planning strategies, the depth of their instruction, and how to assess whether students mastered the content — not just whether the teacher covered the standards and followed the pacing guide.

"Mae Eanes was in school improvement status for 10 years prior to joining the *Making Middle Grades Work* initiative," Jackson said. "In fact, we were in school improvement status longer than any school in the state of Alabama."

With assistance from *MMGW*, the school made AYP in 2007-2008 and again in 2008-2009 and was removed from school improvement status.

"Walk-abouts helped break down walls between administrators and teachers and between teachers and their colleagues," Jackson said. "The school culture is more positive and the students have gained a spark that was missing."

Demonstration Classrooms Yield Strategies to Improve Teaching and Learning

A visitor to **Don Eichenberger**'s American History class at **Springdale High School** (SHS) in Springdale, Arkansas, was surprised to find every student highly engaged during a test review. Using an approach called "Stump the Teacher," Eichenberger had created a competitive environment in which students use the textbook as a resource and participate in positive interaction with classmates and the teacher.

The visitor was even more amazed to discover that the class consisted entirely of students who had failed the course previously but now were on track to pass. A change in instructional strategies was making a difference for these students the second time around.

Many effective academic and career/technical teaching practices are being shown to visitors in the demonstration classroom program at SHS, one of the top 100 high-implementation schools in the *HSTW* network. Three years ago, SHS Literacy Coach **Jean Davis** was seeking a way to promote teacher conversations about outstanding instruction. The faculty came up with the idea to let teachers observe colleagues who were using high-yield teaching techniques.

Teachers Volunteer

Some teachers volunteered to open their classrooms, while others were recruited for the program. By the end of the 2005-2006 school year, Davis and SHS curriculum specialists had used a peer coaching model to prepare five SHS teachers to develop demonstration classrooms focusing on literacy for learning, student engagement, and lesson design and delivery.

The program was meant to help the SHS faculty, but it has been expanded to include visitors from other schools in the district and across the state. The demonstration classrooms are available to visitors each Thursday and by appointment on other days. In a display of goodwill and cooperation, SHS has hosted groups of teachers and administrators from the state's educational cooperatives, the Arkansas Department of Education and the Arkansas Department of Workforce Education.

SHS administrators view the demonstration classrooms as a success. Principal **David Kellogg** said, "I knew the program was working when I overheard a social studies teacher and an agriculture teacher discussing best literacy strategies."

More Collegiality

Teachers cite an increase in collegiality at SHS as a direct result of demonstration classrooms. New to SHS, one teacher said the strategies observed in a demonstration classroom have had a positive impact on her instruction. "The professional development I remember the most is what happens in other teachers' classrooms," she said.

SHS demonstration teachers are urged to learn new techniques and to find those that work best in the classroom. They prepare handouts to explain the strategies that visitors are most likely to see in action, such as:

- teaching and learning strategies to help student readers understand complex text encountered across all disciplines.
- strategies for using writing to learn across the curriculum.
- strategies that apply to all subject areas.

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New Professional Development Initiative Will Prepare Teachers to Deliver High-Quality Career/Technical Instruction

SREB and **The National Research Center for Career and Technical Education** (NRCCTE) are working together to create a research-based professional development model to prepare beginning career/technical teachers seeking an alternative route to certification. The professional development will support new teachers in delivering high-quality career/technical instruction to ensure that students are ready for college and careers. NRCCTE is funded by the U.S. Department of Education Office of Vocational and Adult Education and is located at the University of Louisville in Louisville, Kentucky.

During a three-year period, the project will design and field test materials to be used by states, universities and school districts to improve fast-track teacher preparation. "One of the skills to be targeted in the materials is the ability to use research-based instructional strategies to engage students in learning — an essential skill that CT teachers will use throughout their careers," said **Heather Sass** of SREB, director of the Career/Technical Teacher Preparation Project.

"High-quality career/technical instruction is intellectually challenging, actively engaging, embedded with high-level academic skills and designed around workplace projects or problems," Sass said. "Two strategies — project-based learning and cooperative learning — form the basis for high-quality career/technical instruction."

Project-based learning (PBL) organizes learning around complex tasks based on challenging problems or questions. Students participate in design, problem solving, decision making and investigative activities that allow them to direct their own learning. The projects result in products or presentations. Projects may involve workplace simulations such as designing, assembling, testing or evaluating a product; developing and/or implementing a plan to meet a local business need; or operating a business in the school or the community.

PBL has the potential to help students learn subject-matter content that they can put to use in real-life situations that call for solving problems and making decisions. "This condition is particularly important in a career/technical classroom, where students solve problems and complete projects like the ones they will find in the workplace," Sass said.

Several actions will help teachers get the most out of project-based learning:

- **Begin with the end.** State clearly what students will be expected to know and be able to do at the end of the project. Focus each project on a few technical standards, such as knowledge and skills needed in a technical field; at least two academic skills at the college-readiness level, such as using research skills to locate, gather, evaluate and organize information; and at least one 21st-century skill such as life and career skills, learning and innovation skills, or media, information and technology skills. (Visit www.21stcenturyskills.org for a full list of skills.)
- **Write a driving or essential question.** Engage students in solving the central problem or in tackling the main task of the project by posing an important question to guide their learning. Driving questions are provocative and open-ended, such as "How can you design an electronic commerce Web site that will maximize company profits?"
- **Use a scenario to drive the project.** Give students a "job title." Describe a workplace situation and require a solution that can be presented in a final performance. For example:

> *The owner of a local eatery asks you as a chef to develop several menu items to appeal to health-conscious customers. Create several recipes, determine the nutritional content of each, and test the dishes on potential customers. Develop a set of criteria to select the final items for the menu. Present your recommendations to the restaurant owner, explaining how each food meets the criteria you have identified.*

- **Make the project rigorous.** Create projects that cause students to think and analyze, synthesize and evaluate information to find a solution. Beware of projects in which the teacher does the thinking. The teacher should help students think through the project and arrive at a solution.

Cooperative learning is also essential to high-quality career/technical instruction. It involves five essential components:

- **Positive interdependence — Sink or swim together.** Success depends on the efforts of each team member. Team members have specific and unique contributions based on their resources, talents and task responsibilities.
- **Face-to-face interaction — Students become translators.** Students support each other's success by sharing resources and supporting, encouraging and celebrating each other's efforts. Teachers structure teamwork so that students help each other by explaining how to solve problems, teaching each other, checking for understanding, discussing concepts and connecting present and past learning.

- **Individual accountability/personal responsibility.** Each team must be accountable for achieving its goals; each member must be accountable for contributing his or her share of the work. Students are assessed individually and the results are given to the individual and the team to determine who needs additional assistance.
- **Interpersonal and teamwork skills — Social skills do not magically appear.** Like academic skills, social skills must be taught. Team success depends on leadership, decision making, trust building, communication and conflict management.
- **Team reflection — How are we doing as a team?** Teachers structure teamwork so that team members can discuss how well they are achieving their goals and how effectively they are working together. Teams should describe what member actions are helpful and unhelpful and then decide which behaviors to continue or to change. The process of self-assessment and peer assessment is ongoing.

"Both project-based learning and cooperative learning support high-quality career/technical instruction," Sass said. "Project-based learning provides real-world experiences in how to apply learning to solve problems and accomplish tasks, while cooperative learning not only increases understanding of the content but teaches students the valuable skill of working together as a team to achieve goals."

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The BEST Plan for Mentoring New Teachers

New teachers at **Blackman High School** (BHS) in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, enter a mentoring program that provides meaningful activities, promotes collegiality and results in a positive atmosphere throughout the building. The Building Educators' Skills Together (BEST) program was initiated in the 2006-2007 school year.

Some 15 new teachers, including five who are entering the teaching profession, join the 100-plus faculty at BHS in a typical year. Sometimes the new teachers have been licensed through an alternative certification process and lack a formal educational background.

Biology teacher **Cortney Meadows** and her colleagues, science teachers **Sally Millsap** and **Brenda Pless** of the mentoring committee, point to research showing that nearly half of all new teachers leave the profession within the first five years. The research suggests that losing a teacher can cost a school system as much as $11,000 for each teacher who leaves. "There has been an increased emphasis nationwide on teacher retention and teacher mentoring," Meadows said.

Sources of Support

The school pairs BEST mentors and new teachers by using criteria such as a personality survey and matched instructional disciplines. The newcomers also benefit from a seven-member team of experienced teachers who provide additional mentoring support and oversee the mentoring program.

Regardless of their backgrounds, new BHS teachers have been happy to receive support from veteran teachers in the mentoring program. "BEST creates a sense of community and makes the new teachers feel welcome," Meadows said.

As part of the mentoring process, the veteran teachers reflect on their experiences in the first several months of teaching and plan a mentoring approach that goes above and beyond the customary moral support. The emphasis is on guiding new teachers through the crucial first year.

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Cortney Meadows
Blackman High School

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New teachers receive agendas for each week of the school year. For example, in the first week they "learn the ropes" and become familiar with the school's mission statement and improvement plan. In the 12th week, teachers are cautioned about disillusionment and self-doubt. They are reminded that even veteran teachers may have qualms at this point in the year.

Self-Examination

If new teachers wonder if they are doing the right things, they may ask themselves questions such as: Was that activity challenging enough for students? Why am I having problems keeping students on task?

"Teachers experiencing self-doubt need to analyze the questions they are asking themselves," Meadows said. "Does the question lead to eventual improvement? For example, wondering if an activity was challenging enough can cause a teacher to reflect on what is happening in the classroom and to move forward to plan more rigorous assignments. This type of question allows teachers to assess what they have done in the classroom, analyze observations and work products, evaluate outcomes, and design ways to improve future assignments."

Before the school year begins, new teachers attend a celebration where they meet the rest of the faculty, enjoy refreshments provided by a student service organization, and receive gifts donated by the parent organization and the faculty. The BEST committee includes new teachers and their families in faculty and staff cookouts among other events throughout the year. "We also plan luncheons for new teachers and their mentors during the year," Meadows said.

Teachers who are hired after the school year has started receive extra support, including regular visits by their mentors during the first few weeks. The purpose is to ensure that late-arriving teachers are not overwhelmed by the prospect of taking over a classroom when school is already under way.

"Our high school has experienced so much success in the BEST program that 95 percent of teachers returned last year," Meadows said. "We are working to promote the maintenance and improvement of the best faculty in the state of Tennessee."

This newsletter of "best practices" in implementing the *High Schools That Work* (*HSTW*), *Making Middle Grades Work* (*MMGW*) and *Technology Centers That Work* (*TCTW*) school improvement models is based on presentations at the 23rd Annual *HSTW* Staff Development Conference in Atlanta, Georgia, in July 2009.

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